DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 538 CS 000 772

AUTHOR Sherk, John K., Jr.; Manzo, Anthony V.
TITLE Humanistic Studies as a Component of College and Adult Reading Programs.
PUB DATE Dec 72
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (New Orleans, December 1972), Humanistic Psychology Symposium

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Reading Programs; *College Programs; *Humanism; Individual Needs; *Language Instruction; Language Programs; Psychological Needs; *Reading Comprehension

ABSTRACT

A consideration of reading potentials could produce a more balanced outlook concerning the future of reading in our society. In working with students on the improvement of reading, we find that comprehension problems are often related to attitudes about language, facts, and accuracy that are opposed to the requirements of the learning situation. This is a humanistic problem. As a component of college and adult reading programs, some type of "language" dimension should be added to help students develop awareness and/or improvement in the following: language as language; reading as an aspect of the language system; language practice vs. language potential; and students' current language status. Programs should also be developed to help those students who arrive on the college campus with deficits unrelated to intellectual deficienceis, skills, or physical handicaps, as a relationship has been seen to exist between mental and emotional health and academic success. (LL)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 083533

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Paper, Humanistic Psychology Symposium
National Reading Conference
New Orleans, Louisiana
December, 1972

DISCUSSANTS: David Wark - University of Minnesota
Victor Culver - University of Missouri - Kansas City

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John K. Sherk, Jr.
Anthony V. Manzo
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Humanistic Studies As A Component of College & Adult Reading Programs

John K. Sherk, Jr., & Anthony V. Manzo
University of Missouri-Kansas City

Division 32 of the American Psychological Association, called Humanistic Psychology, is a reality. The 31 other fine divisions, more like reliable old disciplines, have now to contend with number 32 which is less a discipline than a protest against self-limited life; some call it the human potential movement.

The late Abraham Maslow, often referred to as Division 32's founding father, examined the scientific definitions of man, largely developed via Freudianism and Behaviorism, and found them unsatisfactory, unable to contain what has been referred to as the marvel of man's "whole soul." The "whole soul," Maslow argued, is more than "the sum of our response to stimuli, or the interplay of id and ego and super ego, or the bounce of cognitive symbols."*

Maslow believed that one cannot understand mental illness until one understands mental health. "If one is preoccupied with the insane, the neurotic, the feeble minded, one's hopes for the human species becomes-perforce-more and more modest, more and more "realistic," and more and more

05 000 772

*Criswell, E., & Peterson, S., "The Whole Soul Catalog" in Psychology Today, April, 1972, p. 58.

scaled down, one expects less and less from people ------ it becomes more and more clear that the study of the crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimen can yield only a crippled psychology and crippled philosophy."* The behaviorist, on the other hand, eschews the complexity of the human condition entirely by studying what is rather than what could or ought to be.

"Positive aspects of human behavior such as happiness, joy, contentment, piece of mind, satisfaction, fun, play, well-being, elation and ecstasy have been ignored by scientists as have such positive qualities as kindness, generosity and friendship. Scientific emphasis has been placed on man's shortcomings, and little or no consideration has been given to his strengths and potentials."**

Reading and the Third Force: Psychology

Research in the field of reading, has, to a great extent, followed the well worn paths of the predominant disciplines of psychology. Much of our research has been upon the study of the defective or ineffective reader on the one hand, and on the goal of a "statistically-average" reader on the other. We tend to be restricted in our thinking of reading "behavior" and "performance" by what we have been able to measure or observe readers actually doing. We do not spend much time thinking about "ultimates" in reading or reading "potentials."

*Maslow, A. Motivation & Personality. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.

**Goble, F. The Third Force. New York: Grossman Publishers, p. 14.

In this context, it is interesting to review the fate of one thrust into reading which could be thought of as relating to the development of higher "potential" in reading; that is, the so called rapid reading, or "reading-dymanics," program. This program, while aiming to enhance its marketability as a product, has made many unsupportable claims which have brought down upon it the wrath of the reading "establishment." One must suspect, however, that our annoyance with "reading dynamics" is deeper.

Most of us who have studied reading would like to think that we have pretty clear ideas about what can and can't be done by a person when he reads. What was said about "reading dynamics" was clearly against the grain of our accumulated "wisdom." Most of us do not buy the idea that someone can read at 5000 words per minute or higher. We do not buy the idea because our evidence suggests that there is an upper limit beyond which linear reading, that is reading each word of context as it comes in order, cannot occur. The nature of our evidence is eye movement photography, precise calculations of fixations, visual span, speed of perception, inner speech and the procedures we use and standards we set to judge "comprehension." This is solid evidence, an air-tight case which precludes the possibility of such phenomena; except that the bumble bee flies, not understanding at all his aerodynamic impossibility.

Whether "reading dynamics" is or is not a legitimate program is not the concern of this paper. The point being made, however, is our reaction to the concept or idea. We seem to be most offended by their vague, missionic language and tact of this program. As it was presented, "reading dynamicists" required their clients to practice by forcing themselves to "read" (substitute scan, skim, process, "take-in," etc.) at rates which would eradicate the

occurrence of "inner-speech," that phenomena which was seen as chaining the reader to a hopelessly slow pace. Readers were told to break the "inner-speech" barrier and soar beyond the limits to which "ordinary readers," are bound. They were to develop some sort of "rapport" with print which was thought to be something like a higher order photo-telepathic action operating at closer to speed-of-light than speed-of-sound.

For some years now the public has seemed to be captivated with this idea. Thousands of persons have taken the "reading-dynamics" program. Apparently the large majority of them feel that the program had some good or positive result for them.

With the exception of a single article, the literature in the professional journals regarding the program has been of the type which calls into question the possibilities of this type of reading, based on our present understandings of the parameters of reading behavior. Little or no interest has been shown by professionals in our field in the potentialities such a concept may suggest, nor in the serious investigation of the affective dimension of reading behavior which such a program may influence.

This merely highlights the current orientation of most professionals in our field. If we had among us more reading people interested in the study of the ultimate development of human potential <u>in reading</u>, perhaps there would have been or would be more evidence in the research literature of persons who have developed unusual capabilities in reading. It would seem that there is a need for attention to this problem. Such attention could produce a more balanced outlook concerning the future of reading in our society.

One side of us seeming to be saying be cautious about this human potential thing, the other says - "why not?" After all, when someone is able to teach a person of any age to read, or to read better, he is, in effect, developing one facet of the individual's human potential. Since it has been found that most people can learn to read, the accomplishment of that skill represents the development of a latent "potentiality." In this sense, professionals in the field of reading are already closely allied to those in the human-potential movement. Equally important in this line of reasoning is the idea that when someone learns how to apply the skill of reading to solve a problem, or when he uses reading to expand his horizons, to enhance his capability as a more effective human being, he has developed another area of his "potential." This is an important concept and the impact of this ongoing human development should not be forgotten by those of us who practice it as we accomplish our daily work.

Humanistic Studies Are Fun!

The uninitiated reader of humanistic studies in psychology is dazzled by the variety of topics and subjects under investigation. A recent 368 page publication by Peterson, A Catalog of the Ways People Grow. (Ballantine, $1.65) provides a rather complete review of such activities and areas of interest. From actualism and Aikido, Bio-energetics, Group Encounters, I Ching, ESP, Subud, to Yoga and Zen stretch the interest of those in the human potential movement. As an outside reader of such studies, it is apparent that in much of the material there is more interest in the description of phenomena and their effects than in the penetration of/or explanation of such

phenomena. In much of the material there seems to be less compulsion to "close" on a topic, more tolerance for the ambiguity of a situation, more fanciful and playful use of the methods and tools of psychology. Perhaps most important of all is the fact that there is much less of a tendency in the profession for others of different persuasions to point fingers and cry "Quack!" That is refreshing.

Humanist Dimensions in College and Adult Reading

The authors in no way wish to suggest or imply a retreat from or abandonment of current research activities and directions in reading. Indeed, we feel that these research efforts should continue and be intensified, but also be expanded -- 'branched', as it were. There is too much yet to be learned about the basic nature of reading behavior to remain fixated on our present lines of research and thought. Reading is broad enough a field of study to absorb and move ahead as a result of the research efforts of professionals contributing many different perspectives. In the future, for example, those in the College and Adult reading field might consider some "branching out" into the more speculative and fanciful areas of "reading potential." The remainder of this paper will outline several such dimensions which are thought to have possibilities worthy of mention in this regard.

Languaging - For many students on the college campus, tasks of study and scholarship (including reading) are based on assumptions about their use of language which are probably unwarranted. Many of these students have grown up outside of the so-called "middle-class ethos" with its emphasis on facts, accurate comprehension and cogent articulation. Reading, we have found, is a

problem for these students. But it is not the only problem or even the basic problem. Shouldn't we first teach them why we value facts, accuracy and articulation? These are things we inherited with our language system, and which together suggest to us that we should learn to read. Reading being merely a logical extension of our language and values.

Higginbotham* has stated the problem as follows: "While all language systems (including non-standard English dialects) are equal in potential for expression, there are differences in the manner of use individuals make of their language. This is a critical distinction between language as a system and language in practice: people differ in what they extract from the potential of their language by the use they make of language as a tool of thought and communication. Whatever their language or dialect, all people have a range of linguistic-styles or modes of expression available to them and these options seem to be exercised in relation to the requirements of the particular communication environment. The implication here is that the ... customary modes of speech in and out of the classroom may be incompatible with the communication skill requirements of the learning situation."

It has been the experience of our Reading Center Staff, in working with such students on the improvement of reading that there is often a problem which, on the surface appears to be insufficient understanding of the author's message (literal comprehension) and insufficent recall of detail. Taken together, these surface defects preclude discussion and the development of higher order thinking.

*Higginbotham, D.C.,"Psycholinguistics Research and Language Learning," Elementary English, October, 1972, p. 814.

However, on closer inspection, one gets the distinct feeling that these are not always actual deficits in the ability to perform these reading tasks, but are more related to attitudes about language, facts and accuracy which are "at odds" with the requirements of the learning situation.

Experience in discussions with students leads one to the conclusion that "misty comprehension and impressionistic, though 'soulful', communications" are manifestations of "language practice" which turn out to be counterproductive in many instances to learning to comprehend accurately. Weakness in this regard then sets-up a cycle back to itself: poor accuracy, amorphous comprehension, low information load, weak articulation, feeling 'out of it', poor attitude toward reading, and back again to poor accuracy in reading. This is not a reading problem, it is a "humanistic" problem.

Reading improvement per se is clearly not wholly sufficient for the purpose of enabling the student so encircled to break out. It is suggested that, as a component of the College and Adult Reading Program some type of "languaging" dimension be added to the program to help students develop awareness and/or improvement in the following: language as language; reading as an aspect of the language system; language practice vs. language potential; students' current language status; productive vs. counterproductive attitudes about language; the relationships between language precision, comprehension, higher-order thinking, and academic achievement; methods for developing higher language as well as reading skills related to academic performance. This is considered relevant as an activity for the student, compatible with programming in most Reading classes or laboratory settings and consistent with the general philosophy of developing human potential and self-actualization. It also might help some students to survive in college.

Culture-Academic Enhancement Activities

Many students are on college campuses today who have no "readiness" for the experience. Whereas many of us who have been through the experience were prepared for it because someone in our family or in our neighborhood talked to us about what it would be like, many students, particularly students from inner-urban environments who never expected to go to college until late in high school, have not a single acquaintance, relative or friend to tell them what it might be like.

This is not to suggest that reading services ought to include "campus orientation" for such students. Generally other divisions and components of the college do that. By this, we also do not mean the general "how to study" program, although this is essential. What is meant here, is that some attention be given to what might be termed exposure and training in the essential features of the core culture's academic and social heritage.

This is admittedly a rather nebulous area. Some specific suggestions may help at least to define the scope somewhat. Something as simple as explaining to students what college professors do, what their life work is, how they got to be professors, etc., might be one topic for discussion. Another topic might be what college professors read and where they get their information. Helping the student to relate himself to his cultural heritage and his potential place in modern society is important. Learnings related to the student or the individual as a group member should probably be included. It is not necessary to think of this component in the traditional "semester" sense. Various types of one-shot short-course arrangements can be made.

Activities such as having a poet describe or demonstrate how he creates a poem, or having someone conduct training sessions in group dynamics might be included. Manzo* has constructed a game called CAT, meaning Cultural-Academic Trivia which is useful in this context. The idea here is to seek ways to open up the walls of the classroom so that the student's eyes are opened to the world of possibilities before him as a member of the college community, and to have an opportunity to learn the expressions, manners and mores of the academic community.

Perhaps we have assumed that all students would avail themselves of the many opportunities college offers simply <u>because</u> they are on the campus. But we know that many students who lack background in the culture's academic and social traditions and heritage will not avail themselves of these opportunities because they don't know how to do so. Many, in fact, isolate themselves from such opportunities. This is viewed as a waste of potential, and therefore becomes a legitimate concern within the realm of the development of human potential.

<u>Affect and Emotional Solvency</u>

Many students arrive on the college campus who have deficits unrelated to intellectual deficiencies, skills or physical handicaps. More often such deficits are attributable to cultural isolation, prejudice and/or poor family situation. The individual raised in such circumstances is often beset with inappropriate emotional responses which have been recently labelled as

*Manzo, A.V.,"CAT, A Game to Build Vocabulary and Knowledge of Allusions," <u>Journal of Reading</u>, February, 1970.

maladaptive behaviors. As long as these maladaptive or negative visceral learnings continue there is little hope for time to bring about substantial changes in his learning capabilities.

Frequently the tensions which arise in the student as he commences college work become debilitating in the sense that they drain off energy needed for study and application. Many of these students are not sick enough to warrant attention from a psychiatrist or counsellor. Yet they are, in fact, rendered helpless by these emotional responses which they cannot handle. Many students do not know how to or are afraid to seek help. Often help is not available.

Behavioral scientists are now experimenting with procedures to neutralize or desensitize these negative responses, and to replace them with new, more appropriate responses. They do not believe that highly trained clinicians are necessary to do this work.

It is felt that in psychologically "safe" environments on the campus, such as the Reading Center, programs could be provided which would help students attain insight and information about the following kinds of problems: How to appropriately express love and affection; how "crying" can be an effective tension reducer for men as well as women; how to handle anger; the nature and reduction of anxiety; handling of frustration and failure; determination and its relation to goals and objectives; the necessity to modify aspirations and how to do it; understanding prejudice, hate and envy.

The relationship between mental and emotional health and academic success has been studied as has the relationship between reading and certain states of

motivation and bias. Yet we have done little in the area of serious programming for students on the college campus in this regard. We know at this level the pressures are the greatest on students. The relationship between our work and the students' emotional solvency should be the foundation for expanding our efforts toward the improvement of self-understanding and the promotion of self-actualization in students.